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THE UNITY OF HISTORY.*

By H. W. SCOTT.

What is the meaning of history? Has history ascertainable meaning? Not if thought of as a catalogue of detached or unconnected events. But if considered as a continuous picture of mankind in action—not repeated merely in events, but guided by the human spirit at work under constantly varying conditions of time and place, yet following a regular law of movement which it is the business of careful investigation to discover—so considered history has meaning and use. It is a living whole. Cause and effect are here in their sources and flow and consequences. Whatever occurs depends on something or flows out of something that has preceded it. History is not a series of marvelous or unconnected events, like the patchwork scenes of badly constructed drama. The law of cause and of consequence rules over all.

The specific subject, then, to which I shall call your attention in this address is the unity of history. In a brief discourse a few only of the heads of so great a subject can be touched; but I hope to be able to present an

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outline sufficient for illustration of the fact that a principle — or law, if you will — underlies the course and progress of the human race. History is this record; this record is history. Human affairs must be looked upon as in continuous movement, not wandering in an arbitrary manner here and there, but proceeding in a perfectly defined course. Whatever the present state, it is altogether transient. All systems of civil life therefore are necessarily ephemeral. Time brings new external conditions; the manner of thought is modified; with thought, action. Institutions of all kinds consequently must participate in this fleeting nature, and though they may have allied themselves to political and to ecclesiastical power and gathered therefrom the means of coercion, their permanency is by no means assured; for sooner or later the population upon whom they have been imposed, following the external variations, spontaneously outgrows them, and their ruin, though it may have been delayed, is none the less certain. No man, no nation, can stop the march of destiny.

The great conception of Comte, that human affairs, like physical facts, are ordered by law — by a law working within them and directing their course — and therefore may be subjected to scientific analysis, has been so fully worked out by Mill, Spencer, Buckle (in English), and by an army of competent sociologists in all leading modern languages, that it would be useless in these days to argue it further with those who might deny it. The unity of history is, in consequence, the great fact of history. When we go into the analysis we find causes and effects, or trace effects back to causes. Astonishing things have occurred, and will yet occur, in human history. But there are no “breaks” in the chain. All events pursue a regular, orderly, consistent, and inevitable course. But often it takes a while to see it. You can not get the full effect of the

height or magnitude of our mountain peaks when you stand near them. You must draw back a little; you must mount some secondary height at a distance. Then you may see the whole clearly.

The two main facts that form and direct the history of men are characteristics of race and variations of physical circumstances. But they who argue the unity of the human race are forced to admit that physical or material circumstances must have produced the racial differences that so remarkably divide or distinguish the types of mankind. The doctrine of unity demands as its essential postulate an admission of the paramount control of physical agents over the human aspect and organization. Man, in every situation, is dependent largely on nature. Never can he escape her domination. Differences of climate, of soil, of situations, distribution by Nature of plant life and of animal life, varying so greatly in different parts of the earth, are leading factors in race differentiation. Why had not man in America risen higher in the scale prior to the discovery? Chiefly because he had had no help from domestic animals. The horse and the sheep were unknown in America, and of the bovine species the untamable buffalo was the only representative. Man in America had no animal to furnish his clothing, to supply milk or sure abundance of flesh food, or to draw his plough. Everywhere, moreover, in the presence of the sea, man finds conditions very different from those far inland. It might have been supposed that pioneer life on the Pacific Coast would be very similar to that in the Mississippi Valley. In fact, it was altogether different. Proximity to the sea made another climate, that affected all life; and the sea afforded a highway for intercourse with the world, which, in spite of distance, gave advantages here unknown to the early settlers in the heart of the continent.

Race distinctions, which have borne so prominent a part for ages in the movements and contests of men, grew up in consequence of the isolation of various portions of the human race from each other. The process, before our historic period began, must have been infinitely long. As further consequence of this differentiation qualities have grown up among various peoples and races which one or another among them lacks. The modern movement, due to improved methods of locomotion, brings these various races now more and more into contact. It is a movement which, however, has been in progress, notably, since the dawn of history. The East has been pressing continually toward the West. Aryan man, at a date too early even for conjecture, passed from Asia into Europe. His descendants have passed from Europe to America. And from both directions Aryan man has completed the circuit of the globe. He meets his fellows now in Australia, in New Guinea, in Borneo, in the Philippines, in New Zealand, in India, in China. Through ages Asia had been pouring her multitudes, our ancestors, into Europe. The gray dawn of history breaks upon the closing scenes of this vast movement. The Huns came into Europe later; long after them the Turks, both nations offshoots of the great Turanian race. The return movement, however, the reflux of the invasion, began long before the Christian era, with the Greek expedition described in the immortal pages of the *Anabasis* of Xenophon. It was this expedition of Cyrus, with his Greek mercenaries, to recover the throne of Persia that opened the way for Alexander, whose career carried Greek influence into Africa and Asia and gave it permanent establishment in both continents. It was the beginning of the transformation that has made the modern world. Forces that Alexander set in motion continue, in their consequences, to this day. The current of influence and power passed

from the Macedonian empire to that of Rome, and through Rome passed on to France, to Spain, to Germany, to England, thence to America, and so on around the globe.

But every great man is a product of his time and of times preceding his own; and he works in conditions and upon materials that he finds round about him. It was the same with the Founder of Christianity. Working upon the human spirit, He gave new direction and deeper force to feelings immanent in man. The career of Jesus and its consequences furnish perhaps the most remarkable of all illustrations and proofs of the unity of history; for herein is the most effective force yet brought into action for broadening the spirit of man and linking humanity together in a single chain.

The appearance of a great man upon any important theater of action will start great changes, will accelerate every movement about him, will give force and direction to unorganized activities, and hurry forward to results the tendencies of the age or time. Causes in potent operation to this day were set in motion when Cæsar was appointed governor of Gaul. For comparison it may well be said that the enlargement of the world's historical horizon by the expeditions beyond the Alps was as much an event in the world's history as the exploration of America by European discoverers. To the narrow circle of Mediterranean states were added the peoples of Central and Northern Europe, the dwellers on the Baltic and North seas, and those of the British Islands; to the Old World was added a new one, which thenceforth was influenced by the old, and influenced it in turn. But for Cæsar and his triumphs over the north, which put off for a long period, the descent of the Northern multitudes upon the South, historians of first repute assure us that our civilization would hardly have stood in any more intimate relation to the Romano-Greek than to the Indian and Assyrian culture. That

there is a bridge connecting the past glory of Hellas and of Rome with the prouder fabric of modern history; that Western Europe is Romanic and Germanic Europe classic; that the names of Themistocles and Scipio have to us a very different sound from those of Asoka and Salmanassar; that Homer and Sophocles are not merely like to the Vedas and Kalidasa, attractive to the literary botanist, but bloom for us in our own garden—all this, as Niebuhr and Mommsen show us, is the work of Cæsar; and, while the career of his great predecessor in the East (Alexander) has been reduced nearly to ruins by the tempests of the Middle Ages, the structure of Cæsar has outlasted those thousands of years which have changed religion and polity for the human race and even shifted the center of civilization itself, and it stands erect for what we may term perpetuity. It is the greatest and most permanent work yet achieved in the secular world under the leadership of a single mind.

The comparison with it, in the world of spirit and religion, is the life and career of Jesus of Nazareth and the hold this name has on the spirit of mankind.

Secular history and religious history—that is, under the old description, history sacred and profane—go together, meet on a common ground. Again, the connection and the unity of history is established.

Shall I shock any reverent mind? I would not willingly. But in the scheme of history that I here set forth, with Jesus I include Socrates and Plato, Alexander and Cæsar, and Charlemagne; I include Columbus and John and Sebastian Cabot; I include—I extend now the illustration—Washington and Jefferson, and Hamilton and Lincoln. I include the history of the United States of America.

All this connected history is no marvel. It is all linked together, and fits in together. We separate religious and political systems now, and the two run on parallel lines. But the whole world has not yet separated them.

Deeply as the story of the progress of history must always interest us, let us not forget that the result was not due to one man or to one people, but that each race has given its share to the whole—Greece, her intellect and grace; Rome, her social instinct and her genius for discipline; Judea, her intensity of belief and personal morality; Egypt and the African coast, their combination of Hellenic, Judaic, and Roman traditions; the Saracenic empire, its contribution of an intense purpose in religion and war, and of development in science and art. The dormant energies of Christian nations were awakened to utmost effort for defense against the Saracenic invasion; Greeks flying from Constantinople before the Turks, spread over Europe, extending the culture of the ancient world long stored up on the shores of the Bosphorus; Columbus discovered America; the Portuguese sailed around Africa to India; Magellan circumnavigated the globe; a host of daring adventurers penetrated untraversed seas and lands. Man at last entered upon full dominion of the earth. Copernicus, Kepler, and Galileo unveiled the mystery of the world and made a revolution in all thought. The elements of the material earth were explored, and physical science began to have an actual meaning. The continuity of this great movement marks the connection and establishes the unity of history, through examples written in all the literature of the world.

The unity of history is suggested, perhaps, by nothing so much as by study of language. Philological research astonishes, by showing the kinship of races separated centuries ago. Language, the earliest product of the intelligence of man and the origin of all other intellectual energies, is, at the same time, the clearest evidence of the descent of a nation and of its affinity with other races. Hence, the comparison of languages enables us to judge of the history of nations at periods to which no other kind

of memorial, no tradition or record, can ascend. Of the great Aryan or Indo-European branches, Greek in the East and Latin in the West, became through course of ages the familiar speech of millions who had not a drop of Greek or Italian blood in their veins. The same has been the case in later times with Arabic, Persian, Spanish, German, English. The Gauls gradually gave up their own language for a modified Latin. Moral causes, the needs of civilization, directed their choice and determined that Gaul should become a Latin-speaking land. France, as she is to-day, is the resultant of the work of Cæsar; for the work of Cæsar prepared Gaul for all that has followed. Cæsar broke down the great Celtic Confederacy, thus weakening Gallic power and opening a way for the ascendancy of the Franks. Hence Charles the Great and the empire that laid the foundations of modern Europe. The Frenchman is formed by the infusion of Frank upon Celt; and the Frankish empire, with its control of both Germany and Gaul, was thus also a fruit of the career of Cæsar. The French nation is indeed the only one that has maintained an uninterrupted existence from the fall of the Roman power down to the present day; and this long career has been marked throughout by the strangest vicissitudes—alternations of glory and disaster, of misrule and revolution. France has many times been overrun and conquered, and its territory dismembered; it has been a prey to every variety of civil war—wars of factions, of classes, and of creeds; its administrative system has been disorganized under weak governments, its liberties have been trodden down by despotic governments; it has cut itself loose at a single stroke from its ancient traditions; it has maintained an attitude of hostility against the world, and, after unexampled and intoxicating triumphs, it has tasted the bitter dregs of humiliation and defeat; yet even in defeat she has largely led the ideas of the world and still

does so to-day. With the Roman empire itself France has a full share in the continuity of history; and, indeed, in France the unity of history is illustrated scarcely less than in the history of the Roman empire itself. France, though it bears the name of the Franks, is a Romano-Gallic nation, not a Teutonic, to which fact its language, founded on the Roman—not less than other incidents—bears attestation.

Roman conquest passed from Gaul over to Britain—the first step toward the opening of another world, which has become the world in which all of us who live under English laws and institutions and use the English language, dwell to-day. By the steps which followed the conquest of Gaul, Britain was revealed to civilized man—and Britain has been truly deemed another world, from the very beginning of her known being. There, in its insular position, protected, since the early invasions, from conquest during nearly one thousand years, the nation whose influence has become so great, both through its own power at home and through its colonial offshoots—among which our own Nation holds the leading place—has grown great. Through the early conquests—Roman, Saxon, Dane, and Norman—the successive accretions came, by which this nation, protected by its insularity, has had its development and spread its influence to all parts of the globe. Spain, for three to four centuries, seemed to have this or a like destiny before her, but just missed it—through causes that give us one of the most unique and impressive lessons in all history. England succeeded to the rare destiny that, as we look back upon it, would seem surely to have belonged to Spain; yet Spanish influence, still ascendant—in its living or secondary results—in so large a part of the world, remains one of the chief testimonies of modern times to the unity of history. Spain, to-day, has no colonies, no sovereignty

beyond her home land ; yet, of the Western Hemisphere one half remains Spanish, and in the Indies and elsewhere millions of the human race attest, through language and customs and institutions and character, the greatness of the part played by Spain in the history of the world.

Striking resemblances are presented, at different stages of history ; but no historical parallel can be absolutely perfect, because no event in history exactly repeats itself. In truth, it can not repeat itself, because the event with which it is compared has gone before it, and new materials and new forces are added to the later terms, while some of the former terms have been eliminated. The fact that one event belongs to one age and country and the other event to another age and country, will impress upon each important points of difference from the other ; but it does not at all follow from this that real instruction, practical instruction and not mere gratification of curiosity, may not be drawn from the comparison of distant events with one another. We see in these comparisons, though they be not parallels, the unity of history and the connection of history. Repetitions are not to be expected. Very different destinies awaited the efforts of England, of France, and of Spain in America ; though they all started upon a common basis in the New World. The difference was chiefly that of national character between the colonizers—showing that the quality of the human spirit applied to any important problem, is the main factor, or, indeed, all in all. *Non omnia possumus omnes*. We can't all of us do everything.

The origin of all Aryan legislatures is to be found in the village council, which was the first effort to create a legislative body. "From this embryo," says Sir Henry Maine, "has sprung all the most famous legislatures of the world—the Athenian Ecclesia, the Roman Comitia, Senate and Prince, and our own Parliament. The type and parent of

all the collegiate sovereignties of the modern world, or, in other words, of our Governments in which the sovereign power is exercised by the people or shared between the people and the King."

When Britain was finally subjugated by the Romans, the Roman laws were established in every part of the conquered country and Britain became a diocese in the prefecture of Gaul. It was divided into provinces under the direction of the president or consular. The curia or ruling body was composed of senators and decurions, but the controlling power existed in the provincial councils and assemblies. Deputies and magistrates from the cities attended them, as well as the great land proprietors; and the council assembled at stated times of the year. "Whether these councils," as Sir Francis Palgrave says, "were engrafted or not upon institutions subsisting among the conquered nations, they became one of the elements, indeed, the main element, out of which were formed the legislative assemblies of modern Europe."

After the connection with Rome was severed the Britons were divided into rival communities. Then came the Teutonic occupation of the country, when the Jutes, Angles, and Saxons obtained a permanent foothold. The Saxon element was a migration, not a mere conquest, and the Teutons carried with them the elements of civilization. It was in the village moots of Friesland and Sleswick that our forerunners taught England to be the mother of parliaments—that beginner of popular government or democracy which we have inherited. Ancient Germany, the primeval abode of the Jutes, Angles, and Saxons, consisted of many free and independent states. These again were divided into provinces, each of which formed a separate civil community; and there was a great council representative of them all.

Thus the framework of our own institutions is Teutonic, inherited by us or descended to us through England. Roman influence in Britain left little behind it; but the Englishman, who came at the end of Roman dominion, remains an Englishman. It is one of the results of the fact that the land to which our ancestors came remains an island, immune from attack by the greater forces of the Continent. Because Britain is an island, Teutonic institutions took root there, and, as Taine says, "While the Germans of Gaul, Italy, and Spain became Romans, the Saxons retained their language, their genius and manners, and created in Britain a Germany outside of Germany." These Teutonic institutions of England, with their modifications through time, have spread from Britain over a large part of the present world. The body of our own Nation is of this same origin, for down to the year 1820 our population was mainly of Anglo-Saxon origin, and nearly all of it of the Germanic race. It was very homogeneous and composed almost entirely of the descendants of the immigrants who came to the country prior to the Revolutionary war. There were no regular statistics of immigration prior to 1820, but it is estimated that between 1783 and 1820 only 250,000 immigrants came to our shores. Since 1820 immigrants have poured in from all parts of the Old World, in fluctuating but ever increasing numbers, until the aggregate equals nearly 23,000,000. Of this number, about 15,000,000 belong to the various branches and elements of the Germanic race, such as the people from Germany, Great Britain, Holland, and the Scandinavian countries, while about 6,000,000 belong to the different branches of the Latin, Slav, Polish, Hungarian and other kindred races. The Anglo-Saxon influence predominates in our National life, for it was rooted here and has been steadily reinforced by assimilable materials, and the power

of assimilation, under our political and social system, has been equal to every demand upon it.

We need to know not merely what the general and essential qualities of civilization and of our social nature really are; but we require to know the general course in which they are tending. The more closely we look at it, the more distinctly we see that progress moves in a clear and definite path, under the principles and control of primordial law. The development of man in history is not a casual or arbitrary motion; it moves in a regular and consistent plan. Each part is unfolded in due order—the whole expanding like a single plant. More and more we see each age working out the gifts of the last, and transmitting its labors to the next. More and more certain is our sense of being strong only as we wisely use the materials and follow in the tracks provided by the efforts of mankind. Everything proves how completely that influence surrounds us. The earth's surface has been made, as we know it, mainly by man. Study of the earth, as modified by human agency, is one of the most interesting and profitable themes of history. The earth would be uninhabitable but for the long labors of those who cleared its primeval forests, drained its swamps, first tilled its rank soil. Man must overcome nature. The Mississippi Valley would be practically uninhabitable had not the use of quinine taught man how to overcome malarial fevers, of which now he has but just begun to ascertain the true cause. Let us not forget that all the inventions upon which we depend for our existence, all the instruments we use, were slowly worked out by the necessities of man in the childhood of the race. We can only modify or add to these. We could not discard all existing machines and construct an entirely new set of industrial implements. To break with our past, were it possible, would be to reduce us to the conditions of primitive life.

But it is impossible, for progress is but the result of our joint public opinion, and he only can destroy who can replace. Innovation is attractive to many minds; but it is a settled principle that while no form of civilization ever can endure in perpetuity, and though the time must come when venerable systems must die, yet the mere spirit of innovation is not the spirit of reform.

Our Revolution, in its causes, was little understood at the time, either in the mother country or in our own. The main cause of our Revolution was that the knowledge and experience of the colonists in America had not kept pace with the progress of constitutional and parliamentary government in England. The charters under which the colonial governments were organized were royal grants; they were not concessions from the English Legislature. In contemplation of English law, the whole group of colonial governments in America, created or confirmed by royal charters, were corporations created by the King, and subject to his visitorial power, and to the power of the courts to dissolve them in a proper case presented for the purpose. The governor of the colony was a reflected image of kingship; and when the colonial assemblies began the work of legislation on their own account, the validity of their acts depended, not upon the approval of the English Parliament, but upon the approval of the royal governor, who stood as the ever-present representative of his royal master; hence, the whole tendency of their early experience was to lead the colonies to believe that the crown was the only tie that bound them to the mother country. But, in course of time, revolution in England had greatly changed the relations of King and Parliament—reducing the authority of the King and immensely augmenting that of the Legislature. With this progress the colonists, in their isolation, had not kept pace. In their local legislatures they had learned how to tax themselves and how

to regulate their home affairs through laws of their own making. To them the new powers or pretensions of the great Imperial Parliament were intolerable; they held it had no right to invade the jurisdictions of their colonial assemblies in order to legislate upon their domestic concern. Therefore, out of the conflict that arose between the old theory of the colonists, that they were self-governing communities, and the new conception established by the English revolution of the practical omnipotence of the great Parliament, grew our own Revolution, the creation and the independence of the United States of America. It was a regular and logical proceeding—though both sides were strangely blind for the time to the progressive causes that produced it, as well as to the actual significance of the controversy.

Since the seats of culture are forever changing, it is clear that new institutions require new soil. In the old seats new ideas can find root but slowly, if at all. The rock of habit and custom and characteristic, impervious in most places, affords but a few crevices wherein new plants may be rooted. For proof of this we need to refer only to the difficulties which Christian missionary effort meets among Oriental nations. Where old forms preoccupy the ground, new ones can scarcely be planted. This difficulty appears in all its force in the political development of mankind. The great ideas of America are not wholly our own; they were born in the other hemisphere; they existed as sentiments thousands of years ago, and as ideas hundreds of years ago; but the old institutions lay there in the way and hindered these new ideas from becoming facts. After the old crop was off the ground, the old stubble still choked the rising corn. See how difficult it is to establish a republic in France; not from lack of ideas, nor of men who welcome the ideas, but on account of the old theocracy, monarchy, aristocracy, that are still in the

ground. Hard work it is, and slow to get them out. Our fathers took up the ideas and sought to establish them in England, in Holland, in France. But king and priest and aristocrat turned our fathers out of doors, and they fled here. It seemed a hard fate, but it was the best thing for them, for their ideas, for mankind; for what has been done here for man, as man, in two hundred years, may not be accomplished in Europe in a thousand. And what has been done has been reacting for more than a century on institutions there, and will grow with cumulative force as America increases in power.

Let us not be insensible to these processes, because they seem long. They are, in fact, very short. The greatest empire the world has known lasted two thousand years. Yet the day will come when this duration will seem a short space in the history of mankind.

To an extent, each nation and each group within it, has its own development, and each contributes something from its own nature or peculiarities to the general stock. We must not, because of our personal tastes, or our prejudices perhaps, set ourselves to oppose the action of our time. This action goes on without regard to us; it will run over us if we resist it, and probably it is right. From this point of view, we may as well, therefore, allow the destinies of this planet to work themselves out without our particular concern. Man insensibly changes his estimate of the relative importance of things as he passes through the successive stages of his life. In the inexperience of his youth he imagines that very much is under his control; in the experience of his maturer years, he finds that very little is actually so. But we gain nothing by exclaiming against the irresistible order. All of the ages of the world are leaves of the selfsame book, and the true men of progress are those who profess as their starting point a profound respect for the past. All that we

do, all that we are, is the outcome of ages of labor. But while we venerate the past, we well may envy the future. Newton would have been delighted could he have read some trivial work on natural philosophy or cosmography written in the present day. Our children in the intermediate grades of our common schools are acquainted with truths to know which Aristotle or Archimedes would have laid down his life. What would we not give at this moment to be able to get a glimpse of some book that will be used as a school primer one hundred years hence?

The use of history is obtained by finding the relation and the connection of the parts. We must learn how age develops into age, how country reacts upon country; how thought inspires action, and action modifies thought. I can not multiply instances, for the subject is too vast; I can indicate or point out only a few of the connecting links that mark the unity of history. Yet from these we may infer all the rest. Presented in this form, I fear they will appear but the commonplaces or dry bones of history, to which, however, one, though his imagination be not vivid, may supply intermediate matter for great successive pictures. Yet, though I can not in a discourse like this multiply instances and illustrations, there remains a word I must say. It relates to a contest upon which the attention of the world is focused at the present time—the contest between Japan and Russia.

Nothing is clearer than the fact that here is a new beginning in history; not positively new, for antecedents have led up to it, but new in its relations to the world at large. The causes have been accumulating silently during a long period, but have now only reached a stage or state where the world must take notice of them. All now see that transformation of the Orient has begun. The growth and aggression of Russia have awakened the energy and ambition of Japan—illustrating once more the fact that

the contact of nation with nation and the conflict of race with race have been the moving causes in the history of the world.

At this present stage of the world's history there are two island empires. Who shall say that the example of England is not an inspiration and guide to Japan?